

NEWS

E - 242,928
S - 284,097

NOV 22 1973

Screen in Review:

Civilized 'Serpent' Hides Sharp Tooth

"The Serpent," now at the Fine Arts Theater, is a meticulously-plotted, civilized film about the uncivilized world of global espionage.

It is directed by Henri Verneuil, whose last film, "The Burglars" (Jean-Paul Belmondo and Omar Sharif) was as carefree and breezy as "The Serpent" is sedate and low-keyed.

Yul Brynner, still acting like the King of Siam, is cast as a Russian defector who brings a "special gift" to the United States, a list of enemies working for the Kremlin in Western Europe.

OBVIOUSLY, THERE'S more to the list than meets the eye of even the most well-trained CIA man. Before the film has run its course, at least a dozen murders and/or suicides have occurred. In the best tradition on understatement, most of them occur offscreen. This is tasteful, to be sure, but it also robs the film of a more blatant form of excitement.

The entire film has a low-keyed British atmosphere, even when Henry Fonda is introduced as "Mr. CIA" and is seen sitting behind a desk in Washington, D.C.

Fonda plays his role in his most affable paternalistic manner. Brynner is, as always, the spoiled despot. But it's Dirk Bogarde who steals the show with his hammy performance as a slightly fey

Britisher with several schemes going at once.

THE SUPPORTING cast is in the finest international tradition of almost-stars. Virna Lisi has seldom looked more enticing than as a sexy patriot who helps trap Brynner. Robert Alda, seen here by dinner theatergoers several years ago in "The Impossible Years," plays a CIA interrogator who is more interested in sex than in politics. Farley Granger is back on screen with reasonable dignity as a more high-minded government official.

The photography is stunning throughout—misty, moody and foreboding. And the final scene achieves the gnawing sort of ambivalent suspense for which the whole film aims.

IN A WORD: A slow bite, but with sharp teeth.—PHILIP WUNTCH